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ABSTRACT

This paper classifies teacher centers according to the following categories: a) their organizational structure, b) their function, and c) the relationship between "a" and "b." It is indicated that the typologies were distilled from the results of a research project that surveyed 200 teacher center sites in the United States. The paper describes and outlines the characteristics of seven organizational types of teacher centers: independent, quasi-independent, professional organization, single unit, free local partnership, free local consortium, and legislative/political consortium. It does the same for four functional types of centers: informal "English," advocacy, responsive, and undifferentiated or unique. The author observes that some combinations of structures and functions are more logical than others and that as educational planners better understand the combinations, they will design appropriate types of centers to accomplish their objectives. (LP/JA)

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A TOOL FOR THE ANALYSIS OF TEACHER CENTERS IN AMERICAN EDUCATION--A WORKING PAPER

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I. The Need

The concept of the Teacher Center is on the move in American Education. Although the term is probably a direct outgrowth of the American educator's affinity for what is happening in British education, the relationship between stateside efforts and the British effort is far from clear. There are certainly many examples of Teacher Centers in America that have attempted and are attempting to be faithful to the imported concept, but no one can deny that many very different things are also happening under the same banner. Within any Teacher Center effort, there does seem to be at least one unifying concept, that of professional development for the experienced teacher. Although some may even argue with this, the Teacher Center has yet to be established that didn't profess to accomplish it in some manner. There are, of course, many other characteristics which educators differentially apply to the concept of a Teacher Center, thus making it impossible to develop a single operational definition. The need, instead, is for a tool that will allow one to "type" the various aspects of a Teacher Center and describe them such that they can be compared and contrasted with others.

There are factors other than the British Teacher Center to be considered in understanding their popularity in the United States. Other countries have established very different approaches to Teacher Centers. Japan has developed centers for helping teachers become more skillful in understanding and teaching science. These centers are controlled by the government and staffed with a preponderance of subject matter specialists.

Teachers, who can receive credit for working within a center, have responded very favorably.

The Netherlands have developed Institutes which are organized at various levels, and which are designed both to make resources available to teachers and to provide consultant help in curriculum development. Also sponsored by the federal government, these Institutes have become very popular.

There have been local impetuses for the development of Teacher Centers as well. Ever since the heavy emphasis on educational change that grew out of the social movements of the 1960's, programs have been developed that were intended to somehow improve elementary and secondary education. The link between that and teacher education, although obvious, didn't gain much strength until the late 60's and early 70's. Although many features of the "Social Movement 60's" have disappeared from the national scene, the need for better trained teachers appears only to have grown stronger. This notion, when coupled with the so-called teacher surplus, has led to an increased emphasis on the continuing professional development of experienced teachers as well as the improvement of initial teacher preparation programs.

There have been attempts to develop the concept of Teacher Centers for American educators (Bailey, Futchs, Joyce & Weil, Maddox, Poliakov). Each work has contributed to the growing body of literature that is necessary for a mature concept to develop. Joyce and Weil, for example, suggest three types of Teacher Centers which appear to be emerging in American education. They include the Informal "English"

type, the Corporate model, and the Competency-Oriented center. Harrahan et al. (unpublished NIE paper), accepted Joyce's Corporate model, then conceived of Responsive Centers and Advocacy Centers. Their views grew out of personal visits they had made to many Teacher Centers in various parts of the country. These two "typologies" are mentioned because this paper uses both in extending the concept and attempting to offer clarity to it. Although using the contribution of Joyce and Weil as well as Harrahan, most of the descriptions included in this model are unique, and were generated out of questions that arose as data from a national Teacher Center research project were studied (Yarger). Part of this study generated a list of about 200 sites that were perceived by educators to be among the leaders in the American Teacher Center movement. It was out of the first attempt to analyze the characteristics of these centers that the basis for this analytical tool developed. The questionnaire data provided only a portion of the needed information, and although follow-up inquiries helped to fill in gaps, the greater part of this system was developed using a deductive strategy and remains to be tested.

Teacher Centers are best analyzed on at least three dimensions; the first being the organization and structure of the center; the second being the functions the center serves; and the third being the numerous relationships that can exist between the two. By virtue of the fact that most Teacher Centers are public in some way, and because they frequently like to be recognized, it is usually easier to determine the basis for their organizational structure than it is the functions

they serve. Also, the structure often focuses on rather discrete variables, while the functions are neither clearly stated nor well conceptualized. Consequently, the category system for the organization of Teacher Centers is likely to be easier understood than the system for analyzing the functions served. With this in mind, the system for organizing centers will be presented first, followed by functional descriptions, and finally some remarks will be made concerning relating the two and forming Teacher Center models.

II. The Organization of Teacher Centers

Typologies, of course, are synthetic attempts to render complex phenomena more understandable. In a sense, they force the writer to simplify reality, thus reducing the complexity of the phenomena to the level of one's understanding. One risk inherent in attempting to develop analytical typologies is that the total universe of possible characteristics and variables cannot be accommodated. Interestingly, that "risk" often provides the system with its greatest strength, in that it focuses on the most important characteristics and tends to blot out those characteristics that are deemed less important. The test then becomes the usability of the system as an analytical tool. If an application of the implied strategies provide one with power in understanding the system's target that wasn't previously possessed, then the system has value and probably should be used. It must always be kept in mind, however, that no claim is made that the system can accommodate *all* possible variables, but rather only those variables that were selected as most relevant.

Seven descriptions of Teacher Centers will be provided in this section. Each description will be followed by a list of the essential characteristics and the common characteristics. Although some functions may be implied in these descriptions, their basis is the organization and structure of the Teacher Center.

A. The Independent Teacher Center

The Independent Teacher Center often represents an attempt to bring the essence of the British Teacher Center to American soil. The focus is usually on the direct concerns of teachers. By virtue of not being associated with any formal educational institution, the red tape of the bureaucracy is severed, and the program directors and implementers can respond directly to perceived teacher needs. Frequently, independent centers are administered and staffed by former (or current) teachers. Financing is often tenuous, and although funds may come from "establishment" sources (e.g., USOE, foundations, etc.), a key element of the independent operation is that these resources come direct. Consequently, an independent center is not formally, officially or administratively attached to any established institution, though there may be some formal and informal liaisons. The independent center is an entity unto itself, accountable only to its own structure and its own clients.

Essential Characteristics

-- Legally independent from any formal educational institution

Common Characteristics

-- Teacher centered as opposed to institution centered

-- Hands on, real world orientation

-- Tenuous funding

-- High level of "grass roots" involvement in decision making

B. The Quasi-Independent Teacher Center

The Quasi-Independent Teacher Center shares many features with the independent center. There is usually an attempt to deal *directly* with the concerns of teachers, thus not addressing the "goals" of any institution. The emphasis is on "real world" problems, and programming typically relates to activities, skills, materials, and so on that are directly applicable to classroom situations. The characteristic which differentiates it from an independent center is that it is officially part of an established institution (usually a school system or a university). Even though a formal institutional tie is evident, funding is quite often tenuous. It is frequently the strength and charisma of the director and the personnel which provides the autonomy. As with the independent center, the quasi-independent center attempts to be accountable to its constituency.

Essential Characteristic

-- Legally associated with a formal educational institution, but with high degree of autonomy

Common Characteristics

-- Subject to some degree of institutional pressure

-- Maintains autonomy by "charisma" and/or influence of leadership

-- Teacher centered rather than institution centered

-- Hands on, real-world orientation

-- Tenuous funding

-- High level of "grass roots" involvement in decision making

C. The Professional Organization Teacher Center

Although rare, the impetus for the development of professional organization centers is clearly evident. In this instance, the center is organized and operated within the framework of a professional organization. There may well be institutional support, but it is likely to be a result of the bargaining efforts of the organization and the institution. Professional organization funds may also be used to maintain and operate the center. Program will reflect both the perceived needs of the constituent teachers as well as professional organization needs. Policy may well be vested in the hands of a teacher committee, but will likely reflect professional as well as instructional issues.

Essential Characteristic

-- Operated by professional teacher organization exclusive of institutional control

Common Characteristics

-- Linked with single school system

-- Reflects professional as well as instructional issues

-- Included in contract with school system

-- Uses funds from many sources

D. The Single Unit Teacher Center

The Single Unit Teacher Center is characterized by its exclusive relationship to and administration by a single educational institution, usually a school system. This type of center may be organized and administered a multitude of ways, but always with regard to a single political unit. External human resources may frequently be used, but always on a consultant basis. External financial resources are always institutionally administered. This type of center is difficult to distinguish from a school system in-service program, from which it was probably an outgrowth. This distinction focuses on the fact that the Teacher Center will have a higher level of organization, more sophisticated program development and more thoroughly developed goals rather than the "ad hoc" nature of many in-service programs. The accountability is usually to the administration of the institution, and the programming usually reflects approved institutional goals.

Essential Characteristic

-- Legally associated with and administered by a single educational institution

Common Characteristics

-- Often difficult to distinguish from conventional in-service program, particularly in developmental stages

-- Low level of parity, i.e., quite authoritarian

-- Program development tied closely to institutional goals

E. Free Local Partnership Teacher Center

This type of center represents the simplest form based on the concept of a consortium. Usually, the partnership involves a school system and a university or college. It could, however, involve two school systems, two universities, or it could even involve a non-educational agency. The important aspect is that it is a partnership, and involves only two. Implicit in this distinction is that a two-party partnership is easier to initiate and maintain than a relationship involving three or more discrete institutions. In fact, it is entirely possible that one could find institutions involved in several two-party partnerships without attempting to establish a more wide-ranging multi-party relationship. The word "free" in this description refers to the fact that the partnership is entered into willingly, rather than being prescribed legislatively or politically. Structure, finance and program will vary greatly, though in most cases there will be distinct evidence of attempts to accommodate the needs and goals of both institutional partners.

Essential Characterestics

-- Legal, formal, or informal relationship between *only* two discrete institutions

-- Partnership is willingly entered into rather than forced by legislative or political constraints

Common Characteristics

-- Explicit attempts to accommodate goals of both institutions

-- Often a school system and a college

-- May be one of two or more such partnerships

-- Program related to institutional goals

F. Free Local Consortium Teacher Center

A free local consortium is characterized by three or more institutions, usually geographically close to one another, willingly entering into a Teacher Center relationship. The organization, commitments, and policy considerations will frequently be much more complex and formal than in a two-party partnership. Financial commitments also become more complex, and external sources of support can frequently be isolated as a primary reason for the development of the consortium. Program development is likely to be more general, as the goals and constraints of each party in the consortium must be taken into account. The permanence of this type of center is often related to the ability of member institutions and their constituency to see merit in the programs, particularly if the funding base consists of "soft" money.

Essential Characteristics

-- Legal, formal or informal relationships between three or more discrete institutions

-- Consortium willingly entered into rather than forced by legislative or political constraints

Common Characteristics

-- May exist in conjunction with other partnerships and/or consortia

-- Organizationally complex in order to accommodate various institutional goals

-- Programming more general because of necessity to accommodate multitude of institutional goals

-- "Soft" money incentive

-- Permanence of consortium dependent on program merit being worth effort of consignees

G. Legislative/Political Consortium Teacher Center

This type of Teacher Center is characterized by the fact that its organization and constituency is prescribed by legislative criteria. Often, but not always, the state department of education either renders or administers the mandate. In a sense, it is a "forced" consortium. By virtue of this, participation by elegible institutions is likely to be quite varied. Programming is usually carried out by the prescribed organizing agent, with at least some sensitivity to constituent institutions. It is not unusual for a financial incentive to exist in an effort to entice eligible institutions to become involved. Although this type of center is frequently organized with regard to county boundaries, the organization may range from sub-county to a total state model.

Essential Characteristic

-- Organization and constituency prescribed by external legislative or political criteria

Common Characteristics

-- Participation by eligible members optional

-- Financial incentives often available for participation

-- Involves larger number of eligible members than other types of consortia

-- Level of involvement highly varied

-- Centralized programming.

III. Functions of Teacher Centers

Four types of Teacher Centers will be described in this section. In addition to the description, the essential and the common characteristics of each will be presented. The "English" style center was adopted directly from the work of Joyce and Weil, while the Advocacy Center and The Responsive Center were first presented by Harrahan et al. In the case of the last two types, considerable liberty has been taken to extend and broaden the concepts for purposes of this system. The writer assumes full responsibility for any corruption of Harrahan's original notions. Although in some cases, one could imply organizational structure from the function a center serves, the focus of these descriptions is primarily on function.

A. The Informal "English" Style Teacher Center

Joyce and Weil describe this type of center as

> One which exists much more in the hortatory literature than in real-world exemplars, is informal and almost unprogrammatic. . . . It turns on the creation of an environment in which teachers explore curriculum materials and help each other think out approaches to teaching. . . . Such a center seeks to improve the colleagueal activity of the teacher.

Joyce and Weil point out that although many of the British Teacher Centers actually operate much more in a corporate style, this *style* has become the image of the British contribution. They go on to quote Vincent

Rogers, making the point that the British Center also reflects the difference in educational thinking between the two countries. Whereas the British teacher conceives of curriculum as a jumping off place--in a sense, a heuristic venture, his American counterpart views curriculum as a means for identifying and then covering a particular body of knowledge in a particular sequence. The informal "English" style center, then, serves a heuristic, colleaguel, almost social-educational function.

Essential Characteristics

-- Relates directly to the perceived needs of teachers

-- High degree of focus on "things" that can be "done" in classrooms with children

Common Characteristics

-- Social climate and social component very important

-- Flexible, i.e., can adapt and change in short period of time

-- Governance not a high priority issue

-- Stimulation, creativity, heuristics and colleagualism promoted

B. The Advocacy Type Teacher Center

This concept, identified by Harrahan et al., is described as, "Organizations which actively promote a particular educational philosophy such as 'open education' usually through a combination of workshops and advisories available to teachers, administrators and parents on a volunteer basis." The writer has taken the liberty of altering the

concept somewhat for the purpose of this system. "On a volunteer basis" has been omitted from the concept, as Advocacy centers are seen as operating in many situations where there is a more obligatory relationship between the center and the client. Harrahan et al. developed this concept in relation to the independently organized "English" type center, while here it is conceptualized on a much broader scale. Advocacy centers may advocate such things as competency-based education, differentiated staffing, multi-unit schools, and so on. The key element is that The Teacher Center has a visible "thrust," and is advocating a particular philosophy, orientation or educational movement.

Essential Characteristic

-- Seeks explicitly to advocate at least one orientation, philosophy or type of program

Common Characteristics

-- Usually limited to a single, or very few thrusts

-- Not very flexible or sensitive to input that suggests a discordant or nonexistent "thrust"

-- Can be either a "popular" advocacy or an instrument to introduce something new

C. The Responsive Type Teacher Center

Harrahan et al. describe this type of Teacher Center as, "organizations not embedded in a particular ideology (and) which respond to the needs of teachers, administrators and parents for a wide variety of assistance and advice also through a voluntary program of workshop and advisory services." Again, this writer has taken the liberty of significantly extending the concept by eliminating the voluntary notion. Although

voluntary programming may well be part of a Responsive Teacher Center, it should not be considered essential. In addition to that, more emphasis has been placed on the concept of "not imbedded in a particular ideology." In other words, this type of Teacher Center would go out of its way to communicate to potential clients that it does not represent a specific approach, but rather, attempts to perform some sort of a needs assessment and respond to a specified clientele in direct relation to the agreed upon needs. This type of function could be found in many types of centers, ranging from the totally independent to the highly organized. The key element is that it is nondirectional in its approach.

Essential Characteristics

-- Advocates a universal, nonrestrictive, therefore "responsive" approach

-- Differential programming that reflects either diverse institutional goals, or perceived teacher needs

Common Characteristics

-- Implicit diagnostic or needs assessment function

-- Has staff with diverse skills, or uses diverse external resources

-- Can relate to either formal (institutional) needs or informal (teacher directed) needs

D. The Undifferentiated or Functionally Unique Teacher Center

Some Teacher Centers are likely to be undifferentiated in regard to this scheme. It should be carefully noted that this description is not intended to possess a value orientation toward any Teacher Center. The

center may be new and "emerging," it may be the work of a single person or small group of people who have yet to fully communicate their intent, or it may be a center with a function that is unique and thus not classifiable. An example of the latter might be a center that was established originally as an experimental classroom in a single school designed to help a specific type of child, and whose reputation grew until others were visiting it on a regular basis for help. The unique function would be "child centered," and the focus would probably have shifted considerably since its inception to accommodate the new role it had to serve. In this case it would be neither an Advocacy Center, nor a Responsive Center, but rather a functionally unique one.

Essential Characteristic

-- Not classifiable in another category

Common Characteristics

-- Often "grew" out of an entirely different endeavor

-- Either very narrow in scope or with non-identifiable scope

-- Often appears unrelated to its environment, or related to only a narrow segment of the environment

IV. Relating Structure and Function to Build Models

In any attempt to use a synthetic tool to raise questions concerning potential relationships, it must be kept in mind that those relationships are not likely to be either pure or consistent. Rather, a heuristic function should be served, suggesting logical grounds for

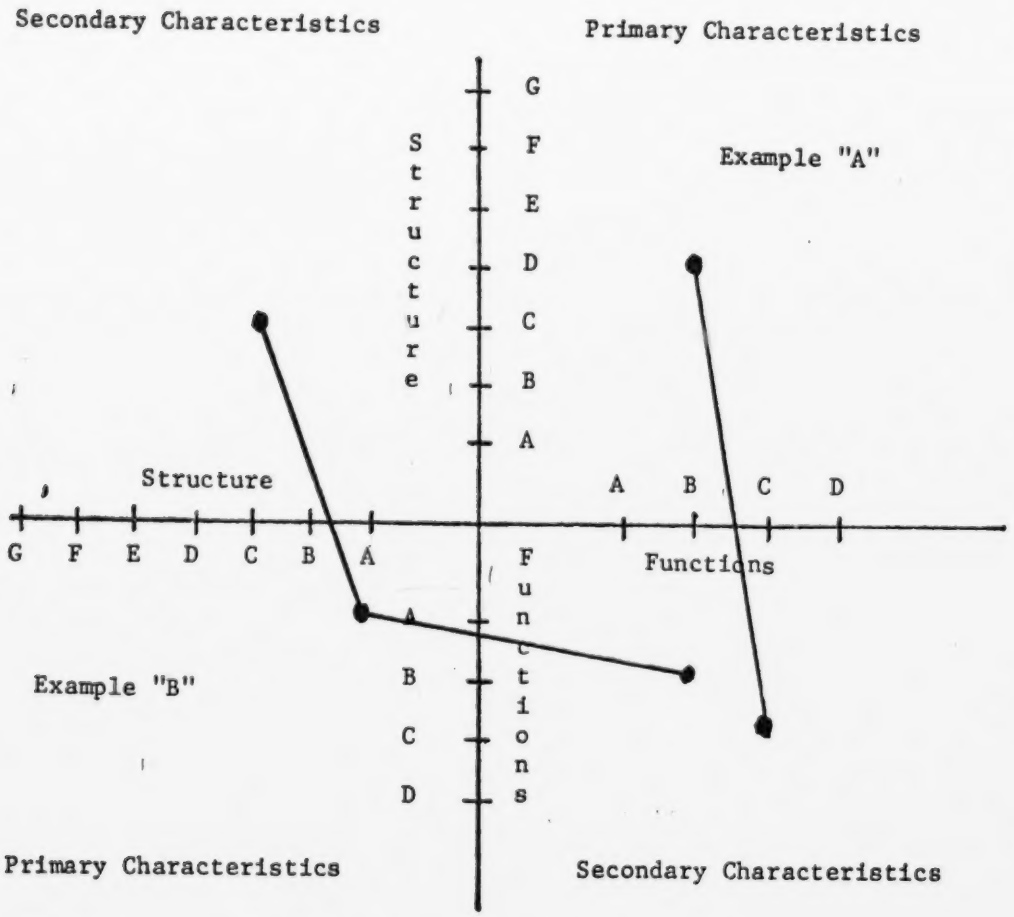
research strategies that are likely to prove fruitful. One would expect that many Teacher Centers (if not most) serve more than one type of function, and that they are organized in ways that frequently only approximates a single classification category. It will probably prove helpful to describe both organization and function in terms of the dominance of a particular type as well as the secondary features that are in evidence (Fig. 1 graphically presents the possible Teacher Center models).

Even though there are numerous possible Teacher Center models, some relationships appear almost "natural," and therefore more likely to be found in existence. The Independent and Quasi-independent Teacher Centers both appear to be ready made for the informal, "English" type of function. This appears likely by virtue of the fact that the independent type centers usually attempt to be accountable directly to the teacher, and attempt to address themselves directly to teacher concerns. Also, because the independent centers tend to be more autonomous (as their name implies), it is possible that they may serve an "advocate" function. With a smaller base for accountability, there exists much more freedom for a center to pursue a specific approach.

The Professional Organization and the Single Unit Teacher Centers have the common characteristic of usually serving a single school system. This suggests the possibility that these types of centers might serve an advocacy function, with the Single Unit center perhaps being more likely to go in that direction than the Professional Organization center. It is also entirely possible that these types of centers might serve a responsive function, depending on the goals of the organizations

Fig. 1

A SCHEME FOR THE DESCRIPTION OF PRIMARY AND SECONDARY STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONS OF AMERICAN TEACHER CENTERS



Example B: An Independent, Informal "English Style" Teacher Center that also performs an advocacy function and has ties with a professional organization.

Example A: A Single Unit, Advocacy Type Teacher Center that also performs a responsive function and has no other structural characteristics.

NOTE: The Capital Letters on the graph refer to those used in the paper to indicate Teacher Center descriptions.

that they represent. It is doubtful, however, that they would be of the informal "English" type.

The three consortium type centers (Partnership, Local and Legislative/Political) are all most likely to be of the responsive variety. When one considers the need to accommodate the goals of various institutions--it is difficult, though not impossible, to conceive of the informal type or the advocacy type functions emerging. Doubtless there would be many exceptions, yet the relationship of the consortium center to a responsive function appears logical.

Finally, it would appear that Teacher Centers that serve an undifferentiated or unique function would be more likely to be organized either independent or with a single institution. Although consortium centers could function in this way, an analysis of the relationship would suggest that it would be much less frequent.

More models and more complex models could easily be built. As we develop the ability to more accurately describe Teacher Centers, we will become much more precise in our analyses. Conversely, as we better understand the relationships between the organization of a Teacher Center and the functions it serves, it will be possible for educational planners to develop Teacher Centers in relationship to the objectives they desire to accomplish. Thus analyzing Teacher Centers within the framework suggested in this paper will provide the opportunity for guidance in educational program development that simply has not existed in the past.

There is clearly need for a great deal of research to better understand both the organizational structures of Teacher Centers and the functions they serve. As these become better understood, the likely as well as the unlikely relationships can be more fully explored. This analytical tool is meant to offer a conceptual base from which to ask intelligent questions, thus providing directions to our explorations.